DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 231 014 EA 015 662

AUTHOR Williams, Rosemary Haydock; Willower, Donald J.
TITLE Female School Superintendents' Perceptions of Their Work.
PUB DATE Apr 83
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, April 11-15, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; *Administrator Role; Board Administrator Relationship; Career Development; Elementary Secondary Education; National Surveys; Sex Role; Sex Stereotypes; *Superintendents; *Women Faculty; *Work Attitudes

ABSTRACT

A nationwide sample of 50 women school superintendents was queried by telephone about job-related problems, responsibilities, time allocations, strengths and weaknesses, and future career plans. The women were also asked to describe situations and pressures they perceived as unique to women in their occupation. The women superintendents were similar to male superintendents (questioned in another study) in perceiving the position of superintendent to be a test of interpersonal skills and a demanding organizational role with a heavy and diverse workload. Both male and female superintendents experienced an array of internal and external constraints and had a broad-based set of expectations for their organizations and personnel. Gender-specific difficulties the women perceived included lack of acceptance on the part of the public, special expectations for them as women chief administrators, and less colleagueships with male superintendents. Societal views of male and female roles had affected the women in that only 1 of the 50 had planned a career as a superintendent. In addition, the women perceived marriage as a career contingency that operates differently for men than for women. In spite of the difficulties imposed on them by their gender, the women superintendents enjoyed their work and recommended it to other women. (MLF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED231014

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Donald J. Willower
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

FEMALE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR WORK

Rosemary Haydock Williams

and

Donald J. Willower

The Pennsylvania State University

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, April 1983.

EA 015 662

Public school organizations are among the most complex of social institutions. The work of school superintendents, the chief executives of these organizations, reflects that complexity. These administrators face an array of problems, accentuated today by the juxtaposition of economic decline and heightened expectations. How do school superintendents themselves perceive their work? And to ask a question that it has made sense to ask only in recent years, "How do women school superintendents perceive their work?" The primary purpose of the present inquiry was to address these questions by interviewing women superintendents.

Although there have been autobiographical accounts by school superintendents,[1] works on particular kinds of superintendencies, for instance, those in big cities,[2] and some structured observation research on the allocation of superintendents' work attention,[3] only a few studies have explored superintendents' perceptions and feelings about their work.

Ogawa questioned 20 Ohio chief school administrators to identify "patterns in the meanings and sentiments that superintendents attach to their work."[4] Willower and Fraser used the telephone interview technique to find out how 50 Pennsylvania superintendents felt about their work.[5] Bau and Willower studied retired superintendents' recollections of their careers.[6] Although there was one woman among the superintendents in the Pennsylvania study, an artifact of its random sampling, research on women in educational administration appears to have concentrated on the principalship. While women in top management have received attention in noneducational settings,[7] the only substantive research we found on women school superintendents and their work was a structured observation study of three female chief school executives.[8]

Procedures

The Interview Schedule

An interview schedule was devised and piloted with three women superintendents. In its final form it consisted of 23 open-ended questions, four of which had two parts. Seven of the questions had been used earlier in the study by Willower and Fraser. The superintendents were queried about their biggest job-related problems, about work responsibilities they liked and disliked, about aspects of their work to which they felt they should be devoting more or less time, and about whether they would be superintendents again. Each women was requested to assess her strengths and weaknesses as a superintendent, to describe her personal work philosophy, to recollect events and impressions from her career as a superintendent and to discuss the effects of her work upon other areas of her life. Respondents were asked to offer possible reasons for the relative underrepresentation of women in educational administration, to describe what, if any, situations and pressures they perceived as unique to women who pursue and occupy the superintendency, and to relate what they would tell females aspiring to the superintendency.

Some personal data were gathered in order to provide a better understanding of the nature of the sample. While career path was not a focus of the study, enough career data were collected to draw a general picture of how these women entered and progressed through the education profession.[9] Respondents were also questioned about their future career plans.

The Telephone Interview

The interviews were conducted by telephone. The literature suggested the feasibility of this method. Rogers reported that the quality of data obtained by telephone was comparable to that obtained by interviews in person even on complex

attitudinal and knowledge items,[10] and Herman indicated that telephone interviews were particularly effective with higher income, middle aged, suburban populations.[11] Willower and Fraser felt that the use of the telephone neither reduced rapport nor inhibited the responses of the school superintendents in their study, and they suggested that the element of privacy afforded by the use of the telephone might even have led to fuller responses.[12]

The telephone interviews conducted in the present study averaged about 30 minutes in duration. Handwritten notes were made during the interviews on sheets set up to follow the schedule's format, and were checked and clarified after each call was completed. All of the interviewing was done during February, March and April 1982.

Sample

A letter describing the study was sent to 174 woman superintendents on a list compiled informally by the American Association of School Administrators. A return postcard was provided so that each superintendent might indicate her availability for interview, her telephone number, her school district community type (rural, urban, suburban), the grade levels she administered, and pupil enrollment.

One-hundred thirty responses were received. Of these, 15 indicated they would not participate, and six had retired or moved on. Of the 109 women remaining, only respondents who were school district superintendents, as opposed to assistant, acting, or state or county superintendents, and who administered both elementary and secondary levels, were entered into the sample pool. These seventy superintendents were then stratified by rural, suburban, and urban areas as designated by themselves, and by geographic regions of the United States. Fifty superintendents were selected, and three additional women were reserved for the pilot interviews. A few replacements were made due to extenuating circumstances.

The sample ultimately represented one "mixed," 27 rural, 14 suburban, and eight urban communities in 29 states in all major geographic areas of the continental United States. The enrollments in the districts headed by the superintendents ranged from 100 to somewhat under 100,000, with the median between 2300 and 2600 pupils. The average age of the 50 chief administrators was 49. At the time of the interviews, 56 percent were married; the rest were single, divorced, widowed or separated. Seventeen had no children.

Findings

Some Career Data

Counting the year in which they were interviewed, the respondents had served as superintendents for an average of 4.0 years.[13] Only five had served in more than one superintendency.

Half of the 50 women began their careers as elementary teachers. Sixteen began as secondary teachers and six began with non-teaching responsibilities, specifically in curriculum, counseling, and speech therapy. Three entered education via business. During their careers, 17 held elementary principalships, one held a middle school principalship and four held secondary principalships. Many served in central office or specialist positions, but there was no typical path to the superintendency. The most frequent among a diversity of paths was from the elementary principalship to an assistant superintendency or its central office equivalent to the top position, but this path was followed by only 22 percent of the women.

In response to the question "Who or what influenced your decision to become a superintendent?" the vast majority of answers pertained to people, especially people connected with education. Thirteen respondents said they had been influenced by superintendents with whom they came in contact. Mentioned a total of 18 times were

school board members, former professors, and school administrators other than superintendents.

Many of the women executives admitted that they did not set out in education headed for the superintendency. Chance and circumstances were often controlling. For instance, one respondent reported, "I was the principal. The superintendent resigned on Thursday. On Monday I was asked to become superintendent."

When queried about future career plans, 23 women were apparently content to remain in their current situations. Ten of these 23 described long-term plans; for example, seven expressed an inclination to enter higher education administration or teaching at some later date. Ten respondents aspired to superintendencies in larger districts, ten spoke of retirement, soon or after completion of their contracts, and the rest were uncertain or tentative about their future plans.

A Comparison of Two Studies

The 50 women interviewed seemed first and foremost to be superintendents. As one of them put it, "I am a superintendent who happens to be a woman. I don't say I am a 'woman superintendent'." That these chief school administrators shared many of the same problems, pressures, and concerns of other superintendents became apparent when responses supplied by the women were compared with those of the 50 superintendents (recall only one was female) in the Willower and Fraser study.

Responses to the identical questions in each study revealed that the superintendents in both samples: (1) Perceived their biggest problems to be financial ones. (2) Liked working most in curriculum and instruction, followed by work with people. (3) Felt they should be spending more time on curriculum and instruction and on public and community relations, and less on paperwork. (4) Most frequently identified interpersonal skills as an individual strength. (5) Appeared less beleaguered

than they are often portrayed, and overwhelmingly said they would be superintendents again if they had it to do over. In the present study the figure was 93 percent, compared with 88 percent in the earlier investigation. (6) Tended to view the work of the superintendency largely within the framework of their own experiences, that is, in terms of the particular problems and contingencies of their own situations.

Features of the Work

The female superintendents in the present study were heavily involved in organizational management. Planning, organization, or management were singled out as job related strengths by 34 percent of the women, and an additional 17 percent indicated their liking for these duties, or their desire to spend more time on long range planning. One woman observed: "It is important to develop management skills before entering the position." Two superintendents mentioned the need for additional administrator preparation in business. As one observed: "Most of us have never managed a million dollar business before."

Dollars and declining resources obviously affect the management of school systems, as the superintendents frequently emphasized. While 70 percent saw their biggest current problems to be financial in nature, 86 percent mentioned financial pressures during the interviews. When asked what she would call a novel about the superintendency, one interviewee responded, Doing More With Less, which essentially captures what many superintendents felt was expected of them. Another said, "I lie awake at night worrying about money. It doesn't take long to spend a million dollars."

Factors related to the management of decline, specifically, reduction in staff, declining enrollments, school closings, and reduction in programs, were mentioned

negatively by 56 percent of the respondents. Reduction in staff was mentioned by 22 superintendents 12 of whom identified it as a responsibility they disliked.

To the question about what they liked to do as superintendent, 37 interviewees (74 percent) responded in the largest category, curriculum and instruction. Seven women said the area was a particular strength of theirs. Still, 38 percent of the superintendents believed they did not spend enough time on curriculum and instruction. One woman remarked: "When you become a superintendent, you lose touch with students; you forget John and Joe and Jane."

That superintendents felt they spent an inordinate amount of time on noninstructional matters was reflected in answers to the question about what the administrators thought they should be doing less. Thirty-one interviewees named non-instructional activities, nine of these said "paperwork." One woman complained, "I wanted to be involved in leadership toward educational excellence. Instead, I have tons of paperwork." The minutiae of superintending, like "handling band-aid crises (also described as "putting out brush fires") and "deciding who makes the best garden tractor," were perceived by superintendents as inevitable and time-consuming.

Overall, 84 percent of the respondents alluded to the superintendents' many hours on the job. The full-time nature of superintending was mentioned most frequently by superintendents when they were asked how their work affected other areas of their lives, and some saw time demands as a possible deterrent to women considering careers in educational administration. In addition, when asked what they would tell a woman aspirant to the superintendency, nine individuals said they would advise a candidate that the job required a lot of time and energy. Eighteen women identified the time demands of the job as a major source of stress, referring to the long hours or the need for more time to deal with the workload.

Superintendents frequently commented on their workload and its diversity. One subject described superintending as "being split into a hundred different components." Another observed, "You can go from a missing bus to a law suit . . . in 15 minutes." This metamorphic quality of the work was described by one superintendent who offered: "I've always described this position as working with a rubber puzzle: the pieces fit then someone comes along and pulls on a piece (example: state mandates); the pieces begin to shift and you have to reshape them and put them back together." When asked what they would call a novel about the superintendency, respondents invented titles highlighting the variety, challenge, and unpredictability of the work; for example, Never a Dull Moment; Crisis Number 1,700; How Do We Put the Fire Out This Time, Sarah?; Coping and Surviving; Walking the Tightrope With a Smile on Your Face; The Thrills and Woes of Being a Superintendent.

Workaholism received the most mentions by superintendents in response to the question about their weakest points. Fourteen said either they spent too much time on the job or they tried to do too many things. One superintendent admitted she had "an unrealistic model for job performance" for herself and others; nine women listed their unrealistic expectations of others among their weaknesses. One pilot respondent said she would call a novel about the superintendency My Candle Burns At Both Ends from the poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay. Ten women conceded impatience was a weakness of theirs. One summed up their sentiments when she said, "I can't stand it when people around me don't move as fast as I do."

Comments on the demands of the job were made by 56 percent of the respondents. One observed, "The job takes all you are willing to give and then cries for more." In assessing the affect of their work on other areas of their lives, 10 superintendents described the job's negative impact on family life. Eight saw the lack of friends and social lives to be consequences of their work. One described the result

as a "cacoon-y life." Some of the superintendents said they felt lonely or isolated. The nature of the work, specifically the necessity to remain objective or to keep certain information confidential were seen to contribute to this loneliness. "You'd like to trust those people around you," observed one woman, "but there are some things you can't say to anyone." Another contended the position was a lonely one because "there is no comaraderie as you have in other levels, like teachers and principals."

Interpersonal Interactions

One representative observation was: "A superintendent has to be a people person .... Communications and interpersonal skills are very critical." People skills, like the abilities to get along with others and see various points of view, formed the largest category of responses to the question about what superintendents regarded as their strong points; 54 percent answered in this category, and an additional 10 percent said their strengths were "communication skills."

Working with people was a favorite aspect of superintending. Nineteen women mentioned they liked to interact with staff and students and enjoyed public relations duties. In fact, 30 percent of the interviewees wanted to spend more time on public and community relations.

Superintendents did acknowledge that in their work there was another side to dealing with people. Personnel relations alone were mentioned negatively 63 times by 37 superintendents, most frequently in response to questions on major sources of stress and work activities which they disliked. Superintendents were most averse to layoff and termination of personnel, dealing with inefficiency and incompetence, reconciling differences between personnel, and participating in formal negotiations.

Although 96 percent of the superintendents characterized their relationships with their communities in positive terms, eight of them named the community as a

major source of stress. Pressure groups, community unpredictability and resistance to change, and a community's high expectations were mentioned negatively. One superintendent assessed community expectations in personal terms: "If you want the support of the community . . . you have to be there when they expect you to be. Sometimes you have a headache, or your feet hurt, but you go anyway." Interviewees spoke of having to deal with several publics simultaneously and the advisability of participating in and understanding the community power base.

While one respondent cautioned superintendents to "stay out of politics," and another regarded politics as "professional suicide," a third respondent believed that superintendents "kept control of education through political arenas." Five women named "politics" as their weakness. One admitted that she did not always consider the political realities of a situation. Another believed she had not given enough attention to "turning politics to the advantage of the school system." Reflecting on the politics of the superintendency, an interviewee remarked: "If all superintendents were independently wealthy, there would be no holding up contracts over their heads. If you do something you believe is honestly . . . for the good of the organization . . . that might mean your contract." A superintendent who described the situation as "too political at this point" said she had seen friends who were excellent administrators eliminated "at the whim of the board members with personality quirks or personal vendettas."

No question inquired specifically about the board of education, but 26 interviewees addressed the subject. A few respondents said they liked working with their boards or listed good board relations as a strength, but most of what was said about school boards lent credibility to Wilson's contention that "every superintendent of schools has entertained the thought . . . that educational progress would be a breeze if it weren't for the board of education."[14] A superintendent who said she would title

a novel about her work The Art of Manipulation, or School Board-Superintendent Relationships remarked: "We're the only multi-million dollar business responsible to a group of people who don't know anything about the business, have no qualifications, and have the power to direct the agency." Nine interviewees named the board as a major source of stress.

Work Philosophies

The greatest number of responses to the question, "What personal philosophy or rules of thumb guide you in your work?" were grouped, by virtue of their nature (or, equally apt, by nature of their virtures) in the category, Log Cabin Ethos. This descriptor was used to encompass virtues traditionally valued by our society; typical responses mentioned doing one's best, being honest, fair and open, and treating everyone equally. This category received 44 mentions by 26 (52 percent) of the chief administrators. The second largest category was "the students come first" given by 22 percent of the women. One respondent felt that making decisions on the basis of "what is best for the kids helps you keep your perspective." Another vowed, "I'll always be a student advocate." Some responses reflected the superintendents' views of administration. For instance, one said, "I really believe, as hokey as it sounds, that administration is a service. Its purpose is to assist people in providing the best education for the community . . . ." Some focused on decision making. Representative responses were: "I don't make decisions in isolation;" "I don't make quick decisions;" "I don't make decisions on the basis of my own survival;" and "Look at the total picture."

Some Anecdotes

In addition to rendering their personal philosophies, 32 superintendents provided experiential anecdotes. Seven anecdotes grew out of the students' perceptions of

superintendents ("The kids think . . . I make arrangements with God to close the schools on snow days") and students' encounters with superintendents touring the schools. For instance, one executive stated that "On a walk through the high school, I went into a classroom and saw a kid walking across the chairs. I said, 'I don't believe what I just saw.' He responded 'No ma'm. It's just an illusion.' "

Nine incidents centered around the fact that the superintendents were female. One gender-related anecdote concerned a conversation overheard at school. To paraphrase:

> Two little girls--first graders who have known me since they were in kindergarten--were talking one day when I overheard one ask the other, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" The second little girl replied, "Maybe I'll be a superintendent." They'd never seen a male superintendent, so it was completely in the realm of possibility.

One superintendent spoke of the day she earned her Ph.D. She called her mother and said, "Mom, I finally got my Ph.D." Her mother replied, "That's nice. Now when are you getting married?"

Other anecdotes involved the board of education, varied school district personnel, and the community. Even when incidents touched on the more serious aspects of the job, like personal physical danger, superintendents related them with humor. Conflict, risk, and surprise were underlying themes.

Liking for the Job

Many of the female superintendents commented on their jobs when they were asked if they would become superintendents again if they had it to do over. (Recall that 98 percent said they would.) Some typical statements were: "I'm exactly where I want to be and I love it;" "It's the only job I've ever had that I'd consider doing twice;" "I wouldn't have missed it for the world;" "I need a challenge and all my talents used.

I've been stretched." Four women said they should have pursued the superintendency sooner. One of them remarked, "You need top health and a youthful outlook."

Feelings and Perceptions About Women and Educational Administration

The 50 chief executives were asked what they thought were some possible explanations for the underrepresentation of women in top administrative positions in education. The largest number of responses, 33 from 27 superintendents, dealt with traditional perceptions of sex roles. Included were comments on societal views in general which saw managers as men, lack of public confidence in women as organizational leaders, female role stereotypes, and the predominance of male role models. Regarding the latter, one superintendent observed, "I never met a female superintendent until I became one."

Fifteen interviewees felt many women might be deterred by the nature of the work, specifically its time demands, pressures and the career commitment demanded. Marriage and family responsibilities were perceived as possible deterrents by 13 women, and 12 noted a related problem, women's inability to relocate.

Some of the administrators remarked that women have neither prepared themselves for the superintendency nor planned career strategies, often because "women do not see themselves as superintendents." Others felt that women believed they had no chance of being hired. "No perceived chance equals no aspiration," summed up one. Five (10 percent) of the superintendents mentioned the "male network" as an obstacle to women seeking top jobs.

Despite the barriers facing women in educational administration, the superintendents offered encouragement when asked what they would tell a female aspiring to the superintendency. Comments like "Go for it!" "Don't let the turndowns

turn you off;" and "Don't let the roadblocks stop you" accompanied advice on acquiring a broad base of experience and training.

Some superintendents' messages to aspirants focused on the nature of the job, most frequently its demands upon time and energy. The superintendency was characterized as challenging, lonely, ambiguous, and delightful. Cautions included: "Don't do it if you want an easy job;" and "You have to be willing to take the gaff with the glory, and there is a lot of gaff in this job." Three women counseled, "Don't use the fact that you are a women." Three others warned, "More is expected of a woman."

Regarding the latter contention, 20 percent of the interviewees spoke of the necessity of women superintendents to prove themselves, to exhibit greater competency, and to measure up to more stringent criteria. Some were responding to the question, "Do you feel there are any special situations, problems, or pressures unique to superintendents who are female?" Remarks included: "We can't afford to make the mistakes a man can get by with;" and "You can't afford to be second best as a woman. You must be the best, the top notch."

The greatest number of comments concerning situations or pressures unique to the woman superintendent concerned acceptance, mentioned by 30 percent of the interviewees. Some said it took longer for a woman to be accepted by male colleagues, and others noted "less colleagueship" for women, resulting in their being "loners," or feeling "lonely" and "isolated." Some comments were: "I got along nicely with my colleagues, but it took three years to be accepted openheartedly;" "I have received negative 'vibes' from male superintendents;" and "After you become superintendent, you figure out this colleagueship thing. The male population is polite, but there's not so much buddy-buddy."

Seven individuals mentioned having to contend with the "old boys" network. One of them complained, "I often feel smothered by that male clique and I don't think they even know they're doing it." Two related observations were: "The 'old boys' club is not one that you fit into right away as a female superintendent, and there is no guarantee of acceptance;" and "The power network for the promotion of males and the hierarchy of how women get to be promoted are two totally different kinds of things."

Having to deal with stereotypes was perceived by a half dozen women as a problem unique to female superintendents. For instance, one noted that, "People assume I am not capable of handling maintenance and upkeep of facilities, but they don't question my capabilities in things like curriculum and instruction." Superintendents spoke of reactions to them based solely on physical appearance. "Sally, Superintendent," as she called herself, was immediately assumed to be a school board member at a school administrators' convention. Another interviewee was directed to a "partners" (wives of superintendents) gathering at a conference for chief administrators. Other superintendents perceived pressures in their "higher visibility" and "the stress of being the 'only one'."

"People not used to dealing with a female boss" might present problems for a female superintendent according to five respondents although one of them described the situation as "short term," as "going away after others have had the time to observe the superintendent at work."

Twelve subjects said either they believed there were no special problems for superintendents who are women or they personally had not experienced any. One stated, "Now people tend to look at the person you are and the job you do." Another offered, "I try to let the fact that I am a woman be someone else's problem."

A few interviewees perceived advantages in being a woman in the superintendency. One said, "If you don't fall on your face, they give you more credit

than you deserve." A second asserted, "I have decided that a female superintendent encourages more women in the community to take an active interest in schools."

Two miscellaneous comments suggest the subtlety of special circumstances which women may encounter as chief school administrators. One individual observed that "the press finds women unique as superintendents. They watch you a lot." Another women maintained that, "There's a difference between discrimination and being discriminated against. I can't say I've been discriminated against. I feel discrimination and I have felt it all along."

Discussion

This inquiry should be considered to be exploratory. To the best of our knowledge, it is the first to examine women school superintendents' perceptions of their work. The research is subject to a number of limitations. By design, it was based entirely on the perceptions the female executives chose to convey about their work during telephone interviews. We do not know how well or how truthfully the 50 women were able to express verbally what they saw and felt. Moreover, the sample was in the last analysis composed of volunteers. Having stated these caveats, we turn to a largely speculative discussion of the findings.

Superintendents First

The females interviewed were school superintendents first and women second. They talked about their work in much the same way that male superintendents did. Their likes and dislikes were similar, as were their problems, their descriptions of the demands of the job, and their reactions to it.

These similarities can be attributed to structural similarities among public school organizations, common aspects of the chief executive role, and to the long term

careers in schools typical of superintendents prior to becoming top administrators. These careers provide an extended period of socialization.

Thus, it is not surprising that the women superintendents stress the demanding aspects of their jobs. Like their male counterparts, they head public, politically vulnerable organizations; the public character of these organizations legitimates citizen interventions, a situation exacerbated in an era of confrontation politics.[15] Furthermore, their work is fast paced, with many varied, brief, interrupted segments, and it is essentially verbal and oriented to people.[16]

The work philosophies of the women superintendents also reflects the characteristics of the organizations they head. The log cabin ethos and the emphasis on "the kids come first" mirror the special place of the public school in American society. These organizations, which have stewardship over the young and impressionable are truly creatures of the society.[17] They exhibit community norms and traditions sometimes even in an exaggerated way. Thus, Waller called schools museums of virtue,[18] and school administrators have been characterized as monitors for continuity, threshold guardians, and managers of virtue.[19] Like other school administrators, the women superintendents are in a sense, clergy in America's secular church.[20] Hence, they could identify their work with noble purposes and maintain that they could be fired because they did the right thing, or as one woman put it, "not because I didn't do what I was supposed to but because I did it too well."

Like male chief administrators, the female superintendents acknowledged their vulnerability at the hands of school board members. However, the women appeared not so much beleaguered or brow-beaten by their boards as bedeviled by them. Anecdotes about boards were related with humor, but the smiles may have come through clenched teeth. For instance, one respondent told of her first board meeting

during which, over the din of confused conversation, one board member shouted, "Shut up and listen to the broad!"

In their work, then, superintendents, regardless of personal characteristics including gender, share (1) A public-responsive job which tests their interpersonal skills and renders them politically vulnerable. (2) A demanding organizational role with a heavy and diverse workload. (3) An array of internal and external constraints. (4) A broad based set of expectations for their organizations and personnel, some connected to societal norms on the socialization of the young.

Counterpoint for Women Superintendents

That women school superintendents are superintendents first and women second is a basic finding of this inquiry. Still, it is clear that beyond the similarities of male and female superintendents, there is a counterpoint for women.

Some of the measures of this counterpoint, judging from the responses in the present study, are grounded in societal perceptions of male and female roles. When women do not aspire to top administrative positions or when their aspirations are lowered, they are responding to these societal perceptions. Moreover, lack of female role models reinforces them. Four comments made by the women superintendents are pertinent: "Society thinks this is not the place for a woman;" "Women are culturally conditioned to believe that management is a function of the male in our society;" "I'm frequently asked, 'How can you be comfortable in a man's job?' The first time I was asked this by a female!" and "I thought: secretary, teacher, nurse. These were the only horizons I set for myself."

Only one woman in this study said the superintendency had been her long term goal. Careers were not planned; they evolved. Many arrivals at the superintendency could be characterized as serendipitous. Nevertheless, respondents viewed the current

situation as one where "women need to identify their career goals early and find a game plan to get there." The superintendency as an afterthought, whether a phenomenon restricted to women, or shared by all superintendents, seemed in the estimation of the interviewees something of an anachronism.

Marriage is also socially defined. Paddock points out that marriage is a career contingency that operates differently for men and women, and observes that, "Male school administrators are expected to be married; but for women, marriage is at best a double bind."[21] The majority of the 50 female superintendents were currently married and two-thirds of them had raised or were in the process of raising children. They recognized the pressures that their time commitments to their jobs placed upon family life, and they accepted these pressures as part of their work. However, a number of the women emphasized the understanding and support they received from their families.

In terms of their occupany of their positions, it appears that the counterpoint involves lack of acceptance on the part of the public, special expectations for them as women chief administrators, and less colleagueships with other (male) superintendents, with a deepening awareness of "loneliness at the top."[22]

Lack of confidence in women as organizational leaders may not dissipate once a woman has assumed the supintendency. More than one-third of the superintendents reported lack of acceptance by segments of the community, staff members "unaccustomed to working for a woman," or male colleagues.

Some female executives feel that they must face and survive a special trial in which they and their kind are at risk. As individuals, but more importantly, as women, they must succeed not just for themselves, but for the sake of their gender. As Kanter remarked, "Women in the corporation . . . became tokens: Symbols of how-women-can-do, stand-ins for all women."[23] Hence, the actions of women executives had what

Kanter called "an extension of consequences."[24] Three statements by the women superintendents are pertinent: "A women getting good publicity helps;" "Women who are not competent make a problem for the rest;" and "Protect yourself and those women coming up by being competent." The testing of women administrators simply because they are women could be labeled the Griselda syndrome after Chaucer's Oxford Student's Tale of patient Griselda, who was repeatedly tested for steadfastness by her husband's incredible demands.

The ordinary trials of administration often lead to a comradeship among administrators born of shared ordeal.[25] It appears that women often are denied full participation in the collective rituals that sustain their male counterparts. Women are frequently "courtesy kin" in the executive world. Courtesy kin lack the status of "real" kin even though they occupy the same position or play the same role.[26]

Yet, in spite of the difficulties imposed upon them by their gender, the women superintendents in this study were neither maudlin nor militant. Instead, they were realistic. Of course, these women had achieved the top positions in their organizations. They were a select and a successful group. Moreover, they enjoyed their work and were often enthusiastic about it. Among the titles suggested for novels on their work were Fruitful Years, The Days of Wine and Roses, A Wonderful Experience, and Superintendents Do Make A Difference. The superintendency was described as "exciting" and "a neat place to be." Comments included, "I love the position;" "I highly recommend the job;" and "I did it and I'm glad."

These women appear to be "happy warriors" to borrow the title F.D.R. bestowed upon Al Smith. Perhaps their enjoyment of the battle is a sign that their war will be won.

NOTES

1. For instance, F. E. Spaulding, School Superintendents in Action in Five Cities (Ringe, NH: Richard R. Smith Publishers, 1955).

2. For example, L. Cuban, Urban School Chiefs Under Fire (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

3. P. Duignan, "Admnistrative Behavior of School Superintendents: A Descriptive Study," Journal of Educational Administration 18 (May 1980); L. L. Larson, R. S. Bussom and W. M. Vicars, The Nature of a School Superintendent's Work (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, Final Technical Report, 1981); N. J. Pitner and R. T. Ogawa, "Organizational Leadership: The Case of the School Superintendent," Educational Administration Quarterly 17 (Spring 1981).

4. R. T. Ogawa, "A Descriptive Study of the Occupational Ethos of School Superintendents," (Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, 1979). See also Pitner and Ogawa, "Organizational Leadership."

5. D. J. Willower and H. W. Fraser, "School Superintendents on Their Work," Administrator's Notebook 28 (January 1980).

6. G. D. Bau and D. J. Willower, "The Wisdom of the Elders: Retired School Superintendents on Their Work," Texas Tech Journal of Education, in press.

7. M. Henning and A. Jardim, The Managerial Woman (New York: Pocket Books, 1977); R. M. Kanter, Men and Women of the Corporation (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

8. N. J. Pitner, "Hormones and Harems: Are the Activities of Superintending Different for a Women?" in Educational Policy and Management: Sex Differentials, ed. P. A. Schmuck, W. W. Charters, Jr., and R. O. Carlson (New York: Academic Press, 1981); and Pitner and Ogawa, "Organizational Leadership."

9. See T. McDade and J. M. Drake, "Career Path Models for Women Superintendents," Journal of Educational Research 75 (March-April 1982).

10. T. F. Rogers, "Interviews by Telephone and in Person: Quality of Responses and Field Performances," Public Opinion Quarterly 40 (Spring 1976).

11. J. B. Herman, "Mixed Mode Data Collection: Telephone and Personal Interviewing," Journal of Applied Psychology 62 (August 1977).

12. Willower and Fraser, "School Superintendents on Their Work."

13. For details on this and other aspects of the study see R. H. Williams, "Women School Superintendents on Their Work," (Doctoral dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, 1983).

14. R. E. Wilson, The Modern School Superintendent (New York: Harper, 1960), p. 47.

15. D. J. Willower, "School Organizations: Perspectives in Juxtaposition," Educational Administration Quarterly 18 (Summer 1982).

16. See the studies cited in note 3.

17. J. W. Meyer and B. W. Rowan, "The Structure of Educational Organizations," in Environments and Organizations, M. W. Meyer and associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978).

18. W. Waller, The Sociology of Teaching (New York: Wiley, 1932).

19. Respectively see H. F. Wolcott, The Man in the Principal's Office (New York: Holt, Rinehardt and Winston, 1973); Willower, "School Organizations"; D. Tyack and E. Hansot, Managers of Virtue (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

20. D. J. Willower, "Mystifications and Mysteries in Thought and Research in Educational Administration," (Paper presented at a UCEA Conference on Thought and Research in Educational Administration, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, April 1983).

21. S. C. Paddock, "Male and Female Career Paths in School Administration," in Educational Policy and Management: Sex Differentials, ed. Schmuck, Charters and Carlson, p. 190.

22. On this phenomenon see P. W. Jackson, "Lonely at the Top: Observations on the Genesis of Administrative Isolation," Administrator's Notebook 25 (May 1977).

23. Kanter, Men and Women of the Corporation, p. 207.

24. Ibid., p. 215.

25. On the "administrator subculture," see Willower, "Mystifications and Mysteries."

26. D. M. Schneider and G. C. Homans, "Kinship Terminology and the American Kinship System," American Anthropologist, 57 (December 1955).